Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 04137 231538Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00
INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07 L-03
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ACDA-07 DHA-02 /073 W
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O R 231450Z AUG 77
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4967
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 4137

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, LE
SUBJECT: SHOOTING INCIDENT IN BRIH

REF: BEIRUT 4110

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. SO FAR WE HAVE NO REPORTS OF MAJOR VIOLENCE GROWING OUT OF AUGUST 21 SHOOTING. DRUZE LEADERS HAVE CALLED FOR RESTRAINT. IN CONTRAST, NATIONAL LIBERAL PARTY (NLP) HAS BEEN MAKING MAJOR ISSUE OF INCIDENT. SOME CHRISTIANS ARE LIKELY TO RETALIATE UNLESS AUTHORITIES ACT QUICKLY TO PUNISH PEOPLE WHO CHRISTIANS CONSIDER GUILTY. END SUMMARY.

2. IN WAKE OF AUGUST 21 SHOOTING AT BRIH, ARAB DETERRENT FORCES (ADF) HAS REINFORCED ITS UNITS IN SHUF, AND WE HAVE NO REPORTS SO FAR OF MAJOR VIOLENCE. LOCAL AMERICAN CORRESPONDENT REPORTS THAT AS OF MORNING AUGUST 23 THERE WAS TENSE CALM IN BRIH, BUT SPORADIC SNIPER FIRE AROUND SUNNI VILLAGE OF BSABA AND CHRISTIAN VILLAGE OF AL MTULLAH
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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 04137 231538Z

3. ACCORDING TO EMBASSY SOURCES, FIGHTING IN BSABA AND AL MTULLAH WAS AT LEAST ORIGINALLY UNRELATED TO BRIH. ON AUGUST 21, SUNNI GENDARME FROM BSABA REPORTEDLY SHOT AND KILLED CHRISTIAN RESIDENT IN AL MTULLAH, AFTER LATTER BERATED GENDARME FOR GUNNING HIS MOTORCYCLE IN TOWN SQUARE. CHRISTIANS IN AL MTULLAH RETALIATED BY KILLING

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

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GENDARME. SUNNIS IN BSABA REPLIED BY SHOOTING AT AL MTULLAH, WOUNDING NUMBER OF PEOPLE. CHRISTIANS IN BSABA FIRED BACK, KILLING ONE MUSLIM. EMBASSY CHRISTIAN SOURCES HAVE COMPLAINED BITTERLY THAT ADF REFUSED TO INTERVENE IN BRIH, AL MTULLAH AND BSABA UNTIL AFTER KILLING WAS OVER.

4. DRUZE LEADERS HAVE DENOUNCED SHUF BLOODSHED AND APPEALED FOR CALM. ACCORDING TO AN NAHAR, WALID JUMBLATT TELEPHONED FROM GENEVA TO HIS HOUSE IN BEIRUT AND "STRONGLY CONDEMNED THOSE WHO STORMED CHURCH AND FIRED AT PEOPLE THERE." FEISAL ARSLAN REITERATED HIS BELIEF IN CHRISTIAN-DRUZE COEXISTENCE AND WARNED PEOPLE "NOT TO LET EMOTION OVER-SHADOW REASON."

5. PSP ISSUED COMMUNIQUE OFFERING TO PLACE PARTY AND ITS OFFICIALS "AT DISPOSAL OF AUTHORITIES". COMMUNIQUE BLAMED BRIH SHOOTING ON PEOPLE SEEKING TO "PREVENT IMPLEMENTATION OF PHASE THREE OF CHTAURA AGREEMENT."

6. RATHER THAN CALLING FOR RESTRAINT, CHRISTIAN AND PARTICULARLY NLP LEADERS HAVE SOUGHT TO MAKE MAJOR ISSUE OF SHOOTING AT BRIH. CAMILLE CHAMOUN WARNED ON AUGUST 22 THAT "FUTURE SITUATION WILL NOT BE CALM UNLESS CURRENT INVESTIGATIONS LEAD TO ARREST OF CRIMINALS RESPONSIBLE." HE ADDED THAT "PUBLIC OPINION WILL ALSO RISE AGAINST THOSE WHO FAILED TO DO THEIR DUTY, AND IT WILL RISE AGAINST CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 04137 231538Z

PERPETRATORS OF CRIMES." PHALANGE HEAD PIERRE GEMAYEL ISSUED PRESS STATEMENT WHICH DID NOT THREATEN RETALIATION, BUT WHICH CHARACTERIZED SITUATION IN SHUF AS "MORE DANGEROUS THAN ANYTHING THAT HAPPENED DURING THE EVENTS," AND WHICH SAID THAT "SMALLEST SPARK COULD START MERCILESS CONFLAGRATION."

7. CHRISTIANS HAVE ALSO LINKED BRIH INCIDENT TO SOUTH LEBANON. NLP DAILY AL AHRAR SAID BRIH WAS IN PART DESIGNED "TO DIVERT ATTENTION AWAY FROM SOUTH LEBANON AND MAKE PEOPLE FORGET THAT PALESTINIANS ARE CALLED UPON TO CARRY OUT SECURITY PLAN THERE." PHALANGIST VOICE OF LEBANON SAID SHOOTING CAME AT TIME WHEN THERE WAS TALK ABOUT APPLICATION OF CHTAURA AGREEMENT IN SOUTH, BUT THAT "SECURITY SITUATION IS NOW BACK AS MAIN ISSUE."

8. INTERIOR MINISTER SALMAN TOLD PRESS THAT FULL SCALE INVESTIGATION WAS UNDERWAY AND THAT SEVERAL ARRESTS HAD ALREADY BEEN MADE. MEANWHILE, GOL SUSPENDED L'ORIENT LE JOUR FOR ONE DAY ON AUGUST 23 FOR HAVING VIOLATED CENSORSHIP LAWS. NEWSPAPER HAD PRINTED AN UNUSUALLY FRANK ACCOUNT OF BRIH SHOOTING PREVIOUS DAY.

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

9. COMMENT: CHRISTIAN LEADERS CAMILLE CHAMOUN AND
PIERRE GEMAYEL HAVE BEEN HOLDING SERIES OF MEETINGS
WITH THEIR FOLLOWERS, AND BECHIR GEMAYEL HAS ATTENDED
EMERGENCY SESSION OF UNIFIED COMMAND. NLP STATEMENTS
SUGGEST SOME CHRISTIANS ARE LIKELY TO RETALIATE WITH
VIOLENCE AGAINST DRUZE IN SHUF AND METN, UNLESS
AUTHORITIES ACT QUICKLY TO PUNISH PEOPLE WHOM NLP CONSIDERS
GUILTY. AT MINIMUM, INCIDENT HAS INCREASED CHRISTIAN
DISTRUST OF ADF BECAUSE OF LATTER'S PERCEIVED FAILURE TO
INTERVENE QUICKLY. IN ADDITION, INCIDENT WILL ALMOST
CERTAINLY HARDEN CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS OTHER
RELIGIOUS GROUPS, MAKE CHRISTIANS MORE UNCOMPROMISING
IN SOUTH, AND RENDER TASK OF POLITICAL RECONCILIATION
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PAGE 04 BEIRUT 04137 231538Z

MORE DIFFICULT. END COMMENT.
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Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

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EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
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